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INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000970

SIPDIS

DEPT. FOR EUR/SE AND NEA/I

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TAGS: PREL PTER TU I2

SUBJECT: TURKS SEEK ELECTORAL EQUALITY IN KIRKUK

REF: A. BAGHDAD 1535

1B. BAGHDAD 1557

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (S) SUMMARY: GOT officials are seeking to gain traction on a proposal to amend Iraq's draft provincial elections law to incorporate a guaranteed power-sharing arrangement for Kirkuk that would help protect Turkmen equities. Acknowledging they are late, since the draft law is already far along, MFA Iraq Special Representative Murat Ozcelik claims sufficient support among Arab legislators for the idea that he plans to discuss the concept with Nechirvan Barzani, perhaps as early as May 25 in London. The GOT hopes to gain Iraqi Kurdish concurrence in a plan that would involve power-sharing at the provincial level in Kirkuk on a 32-32-32-4 basis, making clear it leaves the final status issue to be resolved. Acceptance of the concept by Iraqi Kurdish leaders would, according to the GOT, go far in helping alleviate continued Turkish nervousness over Kirkuk's final status and the ability of ethnic Turkmen to adequately protect their interests. END SUMMARY

SPECIAL ELECTORAL PROCESS FOR KIRKUK

12. (S) MFA U/S Apakan convoked Ambassador May 20 to convey GOT interest in, and seek USG support for, a proposal which would amend Iraq's draft provincial elections law to provide for a special electoral power-sharing arrangement for Kirkuk Province, previewed by Ozcelik in Baghdad May 13 (Ref A). Under the proposal, Arabs, Kurds, and Turkmen would elect representatives to fill 32 percent of the provincial assembly seats, with the final four percent reserved for Christians and other minorities. Apakan noted Kirkuk is becoming a "hot issue" once again. The GOT's proposal is an effort to prevent it from becoming a "burning one." He characterized the initiative as providing "an interim solution" to the disputed Kirkuk boundary issue. From Turkey's perspective, it does so without prejudicing ongoing efforts by UNAMI's Steffan de Mistura to arrive at a consensus resolution.

13. (S) Apakan made clear Turkey continues to adhere to its long-standing position that Kirkuk should not be integrated into Iraq's Kurdish Region and hopes the UN-brokered process will lead to an eventual "special status" for most of the

province, ensuring Kirkuk remains an "Iraqi" city. He noted Ozcelik is talking to representatives of all communities on this issue and asked for USG help in achieving consensus and a "co-habitation" in Kirkuk.

¶4. (S) Ozcelik, who joined Apakan in the meeting and then met separately with Ambassador May 21, acknowledged the draft provincial election law is quite far along in the COR and must be passed by the end of June to ensure provincial elections take place on time later this year. Nevertheless, his discussions with officials (NFI) of several parties, including ISCI and Dawa, had demonstrated sufficient support for such an amendment to encourage his plan to pursue the issue further with Nechirvan Barzani and President Talabani. Ozcelik spoke with Nechirvan Barzani on May 20 and they tentatively plan to meet May 25 in London as Barzani returns from the United States.

¶5. (S) Ozcelik noted Iraqi Turkmen officials had told him they have more in common with Kurds than with Arabs, having suffered as minorities under Saddam Hussein's regime. Under the proposed power-sharing arrangement, the Turkmen would have the ability to cooperate with Kurds to protect their common interests, with a combined 64 percent of the provincial assembly seats. He acknowledged the Turkmen have harmed themselves and their own interests in boycotting assembly proceedings over the past year. He had been pushing members hard in recent weeks to resume their participation, an effort that had proved successful. Ozcelik said he believes the upcoming (June 10) general congress of the Iraqi

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Turkmen Front (ITF) will bring about substantial change to the party that will lead ITF to become truly representative of the entire Turkmen community throughout Iraq (not just Kirkuk) and to become a more liberal, moderate, and constructive actor in Iraq's polity.

¶6. (S) Ambassador undertook to report Ankara's concerns and noted Ozcelik's earlier discussion with Ambassador Crocker. He wondered how the Turkish proposal benefits the Kurds. The Kurds might see potential for an Arab/Turkmen axis that could block resolution of the area's final status. Ozcelik's contacts with Nechirvan Barzani could be key. Ambassador also urged that Turkey do everything possible to keep separate the Kirkuk and PKK issues in their contacts with the KRG; conflation of the two would confirm Kurdish suspicions that GOT action to counter the PKK presence in northern Iraq actually has been designed to pursue a broader agenda of limiting the Iraqi Kurds. He also encouraged Ozcelik's continued efforts to moderate ITF behavior, noting how poorly perceived the party is in Iraq, not only among Kurds and Arabs but even within the Turkmen community itself.

Continued Turkish Engagement With Iraq

¶7. (C) Ozcelik indicated Turkish efforts on the Kirkuk electoral process are designed to ensure the continuation of Turkey's long-term strategic goal of befriending Iraqi Kurds and countering Iran's negative influence in Iraq. Kurdish efforts to incorporate Kirkuk will only serve to derail Turkey's nascent outreach to the KRG and Iraq as a whole. He noted PM Erdogan hopes to travel in June to Baghdad to demonstrate Turkish support for PM Maliki and the GOI at the highest level. GOT officials hope still to launch the Talabani-proposed senior level joint commission during the visit, but await word from PM Maliki on which ministers he plans to involve in its initial meeting. There is as yet no plan either for the next round of Neighbors Process Working Group meetings or the U.S.-Turkey-Iraq gas working group. The GOT hopes to have adequate senior-level Iraqi participation at the next gathering to ensure there is real content with actionable results. Ambassador asked Ozcelik also to track progress on finalizing the Turkey-Iraq bilateral military cooperation agreement, noting its

conclusion would allow proposed training and other cooperative activities to launch, further cementing long-term Turkey-Iraq relations and helping ease tensions over Turkish kinetic counterterrorism operations in northern Iraq. Ambassador also previewed USG efforts to breathe new life into the trilateral IZ-TU-U.S. process to facilitate action against the PKK, noting Secretary Rice would likely discuss it with FM Babacan May 29 at the ICI Ministerial in Stockholm.

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